

A GUIDE FOR

A Just and Resilient Recovery

Introduction

How can local governments pursue a just and resilient recovery in response to Covid-19?

Disasters and attendant economic contractions exacerbate pre-existing inequities by disproportionately affecting marginalized and vulnerable populations, and the typical implementation of recovery efforts can further entrench these inequities. U.S. federal disaster recovery systems are characterized by bureaucracy and structures that often undermine the ability of the most affected communities to recover. State and local governments, in the midst of the COVID-19 crisis as well as past crises, are forced to navigate the federal recovery system as they face multiple crises without the level of resources and authority appropriate to the scale of the challenges.

As the impacts of COVID-19 continue to worsen, state and local governments must grapple with how to approach the recovery process and what goals to pursue—and now, as ever, pursuing a just and resilient recovery is both a moral imperative and an economic necessity. Communities cannot fully recover if a significant portion of their populations continue to struggle following a disaster. This is not about a small subset of places: even before the crisis, there was no single congressional district in the United States where a full-time minimum wage worker could afford a two-bedroom apartment.¹ This is not about a small fraction of the population: households earning below 200 percent of the poverty line—for example, a family of four earning less than \$50,000 a year—make up a third of the U.S. population.² In fact, marginalized and vulnerable populations are the majority of our communities and workforce. The economic, racial, and social inequities in this country are the result of historical and ongoing policies and decisions and will only be further exacerbated by the crisis.

In this moment, local governments—as the central actors in deploying federal funding from the CARES Act and future federal stimulus bills—have the opportunity and mandate to choose whether they will pursue a just and resilient recovery, with racial justice, community empowerment, and equity as their goals. Laudably, cities have exerted their political autonomy to take progressive action. Before the COVID-19 crisis, such actions had included declaring sanctuary cities, recommitting to the Paris Climate Accord, increasing living wages, regulating corporate actors on behalf of workers, and otherwise promoting local policies rooted in the politics of who cities represent. With the COVID-19 crisis, this has again been the case, with many cities implementing local shelter-in-place orders, disaster relief programs, and reopening guidelines where there have been confused and conflicting messages at the federal and sometimes state levels.

This guide makes actionable recommendations for local governments to continue to respond to, recover from, and rebuild after the COVID-19 crisis and other crises in the future.

While this guide is primarily targeted to local governments, it also speaks to community-based organizations, advocates, and philanthropies who are seeking to partner with local governments and to hold them accountable through the recovery process.

The guide is organized around a framework for local governments and community stakeholders to imagine, and then make possible, a just and resilient recovery. The framework consists of four phases that follow a crisis event—Emergency Response, Stabilization, Adaptive Recovery, and Institutionalization—that roughly capture four sets of post-disaster conditions and challenges. For each phase, the guide will walk through key challenges, guiding questions, action items, and examples, each developed to center the disaster recovery process on the needs of marginalized and vulnerable populations.

About the Authors

This guide was developed by [HR&A Advisors](#) in partnership with the Ford Foundation's Cities and States team.

We are a mission-driven public policy, economic development, and resilience consulting firm.

From empowering local decision makers through capacity-building programs, to implementing resilience efforts in response to natural disasters, HR&A is an industry leader in strategic resilience thinking. Our interdisciplinary approach combines over 40 years of experience in organizational strategy, planning and community development, public-private partnerships, stakeholder and community engagement, and institutional change management. We focus on translating the ideas of communities and their advocates into meaningful systems change, by leveraging a deep understanding of government, knowledge of local and private economic forces, and analytical rigor to promote racial, economic, and environmental justice. Through risk assessments, community plans, large-scale public engagement strategies, and project implementation, we help government, civic, and business leaders promote more inclusive development and build more dynamic and resilient cities while leveraging diverse funding and partnership opportunities.

We have led planning and implementation efforts to help communities transition from recovery to resilience in cities throughout the nation.

HR&A Advisors is a leader in resiliency planning in the United States. We have helped local governments respond to and build resilience after major disruptive natural disasters, such as by supporting the Resilient Houston planning effort after Hurricane Harvey; managing the inclusive NY Rising Community Reconstruction Program efforts for New York State after Hurricane Sandy; forming a peer network for mayors in Puerto Rico after Hurricane Maria; and working with the Rockefeller Foundation on its 100 Resilient Cities initiative, leading the development of resilience strategies for 11 U.S. cities and managing the foundation's Capacity Building Initiative for the National Disaster Resilience Competition. We have worked to build long-term community resilience, designing and implementing Talking Transition community engagement efforts for major transitions of municipal power in New York City, Washington D.C., and Harris County (Houston); and creating long-term economic development plans for a wide variety of urban areas.

Throughout these engagements, we have provided stakeholder coordination frameworks, guidance, and best practices for recovery efforts, developing a public-private approach to implementation that draws on community values and priorities to build local consensus and ownership. In the months and years ahead, HR&A is committed to working with public, private, and nonprofit partners to learn from our common experiences, and to design and implement strategies that work towards making resiliency and equity ubiquitous across our communities.

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This guide uses language that contains deep significance and nuance, both as understood by different communities and as employed in the surrounding literature. The glossary below serves the dual purpose of defining some of these words and clarifying the values that underly this guide:

JUST AND INCLUSIVE CITIES:

“Cities that put people first and put equity and social justice at the center of policy and design. Just and inclusive cities communicate to their residents: You belong here. In a just city, residents have the power and the resources to collectively shape, change, and plan their cities.”³

RESILIENCE:

“The capacity of individuals, communities, institutions, businesses, and systems within a city to survive, adapt, and grow, no matter what kinds of chronic stresses and acute shocks they experience. Shocks are typically considered single event disasters, such as fires, earthquakes, and floods. Stresses are factors that pressure a city on a daily or reoccurring basis, such as chronic food and water shortages, an overtaxed transportation system, endemic violence, or high unemployment. City resilience is about making a city better, in both good times and bad, for the benefit of all its citizens, particularly the poor and vulnerable.”⁴

RACIAL EQUITY:

“Race can no longer be used to predict life outcomes and outcomes for all groups are improved.”⁵

MARGINALIZED POPULATIONS:

“Marginalized populations are groups and communities that experience discrimination and exclusion (social, political and economic) because of unequal power relationships across economic, political, social and cultural dimensions.”⁶

SOCIAL VULNERABILITY:

“Every community must prepare for and respond to hazardous events, whether a natural disaster like a tornado or disease outbreak, or a human-made event such as a harmful chemical spill. A number of factors, including poverty, lack of access to transportation, and crowded housing may weaken a community’s ability to prevent human suffering and financial loss in a disaster. These factors are known as social vulnerability.”⁷

DISPARATE IMPACT:

“Disparate impact occurs when government or certain private actors unjustifiably pursue practices that have a disproportionately harmful effect on communities of color and other groups protected by the Fair Housing Act. This standard is often used in challenging discrimination in mortgage lending, homeowners’ insurance, exclusionary zoning, redevelopment, and demolition of public housing. Disparate impact helps to screen out covert racial discrimination as well as practices that may seem neutral on their face, but actually exacerbate segregation or the effects of prior racial discrimination.”⁸

EQUITABLE DEVELOPMENT:

“When we achieve equitable development, we increase the capacity of people of color to strengthen their communities and determine their own future and that of their neighborhoods. We distribute the benefits and burdens of growth equitably among people of all races, ethnic backgrounds, incomes, and geographies/neighborhoods. We encourage multicultural communities where tenured and newcomer residents can thrive. And we provide meaningful choices for the most impacted people of color to live, work, and define their own culture throughout all neighborhoods.”⁹

CATALYTIC INITIATIVES:

Use racial equity as a guiding principle for regional development in order to advance new development policies, practices, and investments that foster shared prosperity, health, and resilience.¹⁰

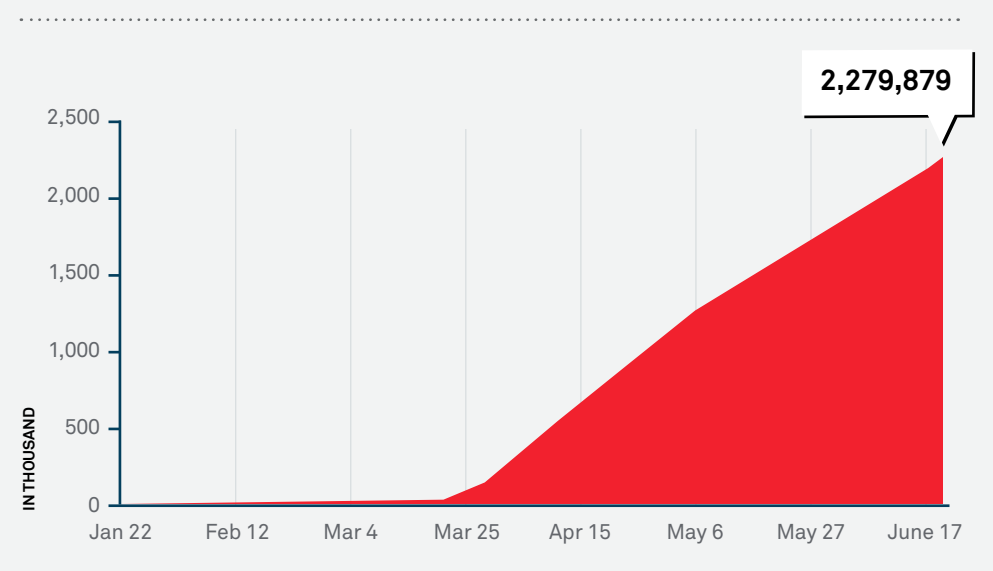
Context

How severe is the COVID-19 crisis?

While any major disaster is remarkable to the communities it affects, the COVID-19 pandemic has been unique in its magnitude, scope, and nature.

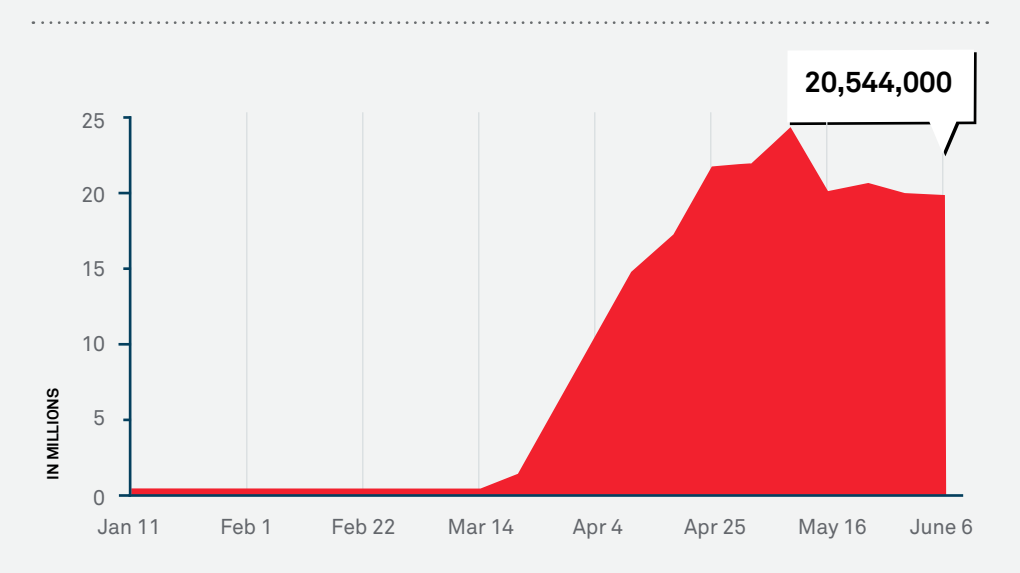
This disaster is simultaneously the largest global **public health crisis** of its kind in a century, placing extraordinary strain on healthcare systems;

Confirmed U.S. COVID-19 Cases¹¹



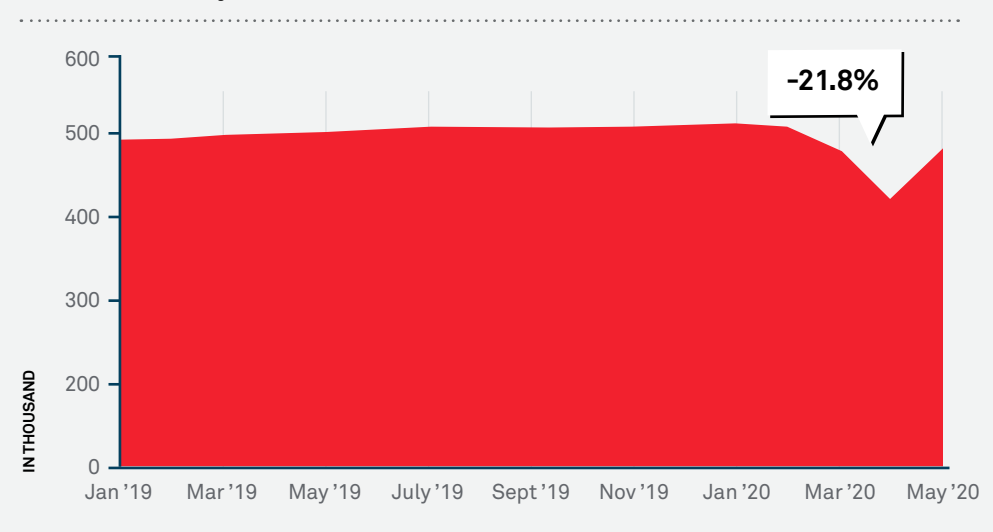
An **unemployment crisis** characterized by the most rapid increase in unemployment claims on record in the U.S., leading to Depression-era levels of unemployment;

Weekly Number of Continued Claims (Insured Unemployment)¹³



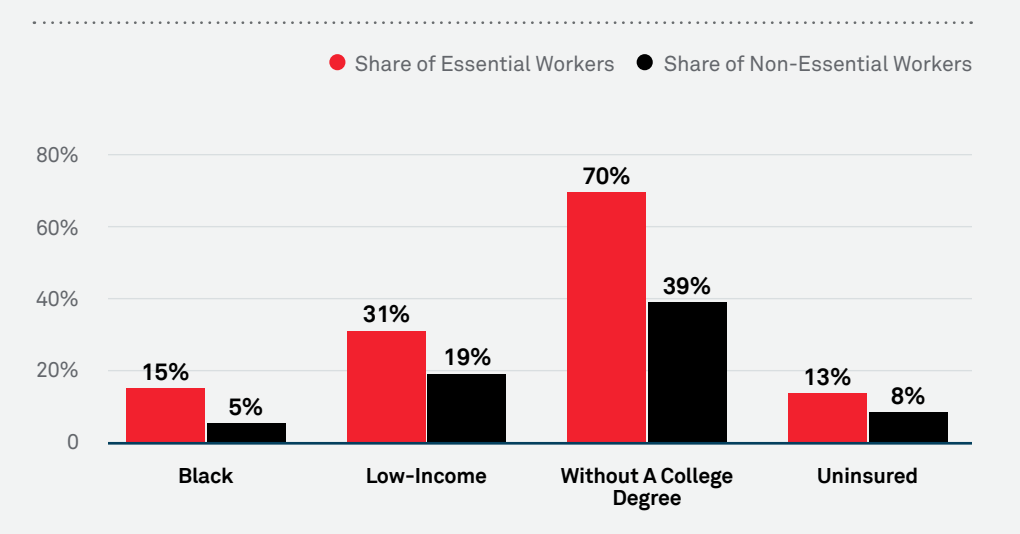
An **economic crisis** that has frozen consumer spending and sentiment, causing hundreds of thousands of businesses to shutter;

Advance Monthly Retail and Food Service Sales¹²



And a **worker protection crisis** for those who remain employed, as the rights and wellbeing of many essential workers are strained by low pay, poor benefits, and ongoing health risks. One third of U.S. adults claim to have been deemed essential frontline workers by their local governments, and have therefore faced greater risks through continued exposure to the novel coronavirus.¹⁴

Characteristics of Essential and Non-Essential Workers¹⁵



The U.S. has rarely dealt with a crisis of this scale, and it has rarely dealt with a crisis of this type. The aftermath of this crisis will entail an unusually uncertain recovery, in part because there is no clear “aftermath.” Most disasters consist of a visible or otherwise identifiable event that marks a low point from which the community can rebuild. With COVID-19, several months in, the world is still moving deeper into the crisis, with no clear end in sight and no obvious turning point to work away from. The potential for new or renewed outbreaks suggests that the path to recovery will be nonlinear, easily destabilized, and lengthy.

Why are the impacts of this and past disasters so severe and inequitable?

For a crisis that is so frequently characterized as unprecedented and unknowable, one aspect is regrettably familiar: the crisis has devastated vulnerable and marginalized populations, particularly Black and Latinx communities. For all the harm it has caused, COVID-19 did not unilaterally generate racial or class disparity; instead, it exposed and deepened longstanding inequities created by historic policies and decisions:

Disparities in COVID-19 impacts

...are unsurprising in a nation where:

Black populations represent an outsized share of coronavirus infections and fatalities relative to their shares of the overall population in 20 of 28 states for which racial infection data is available,¹⁶ and especially in dense and historically segregated cities such as Chicago, Detroit, Milwaukee, and New Orleans.

- 38 percent of Black workers are employed in essential service industries that risk greater exposure to the virus, compared to 27 percent of White workers;¹⁷
- Black populations were found to have higher-than-average rates of underlying health conditions (such as high blood pressure¹⁸ and diabetes) that intensify COVID-19 fatality rates;
- As both a legacy of racial segregation and an outcome of ongoing economic development practices, Black people are exposed to 1.5 times more particulate matter than white people, leading to higher asthma rates;¹⁹ and
- Black people are less likely to be insured relative to White people,²⁰ as many southern states with a high concentration of Black people have restricted Medicaid. This results in a lack of preventative care and access to healthcare treatment.

Undocumented immigrants have been actively excluded from federal coronavirus stimulus aid.²¹

- Policies of exclusion have prevented undocumented immigrants from accessing quality or timely healthcare. Undocumented immigrants who are Latinx women, in particular, may suffer poorer health as measured by high blood pressure and BMI.²²

A lack of savings has led low-income households to scramble for emergency cash and turn to food banks, many for the first time.²³⁻²⁴

- Six in ten Americans do not have enough saved to cover three months of expenses.²⁵

Disparities in COVID-19 impacts

...are unsurprising in a nation where:

Women are facing higher rates of pandemic-driven unemployment, are suffering from an uptick in domestic violence, and have decreased access to family planning services.²⁶

- Women are already “occupationally segregated in low-wage jobs” that were either the first to go or remain essential but high-risk. In Mississippi, for example, women make up 70 percent of food prep workers and servers, eight in ten cashiers, and about 90 percent of nurses, medical assistants, and home health aides.²⁷

The Navajo Nation has grappled with an infection and death rate higher than that of many states.²⁸

- Residents of the Navajo Nation reservation face a 40 percent unemployment rate and poverty rate, and a third of the population has underlying health conditions including diabetes, heart conditions and lung disease.²⁹

There are countless other examples of the disparate impacts faced by marginalized and vulnerable communities: LGBTQIA+ individuals who face workforce discrimination and outsized healthcare coverage gaps compared to cisgender and straight counterparts³⁰; sex workers who are excluded from small business assistance³¹; justice-involved individuals whose wellbeing is repeatedly neglected during disaster periods; homeless individuals and families who struggle to find stable housing in even the best of times; domestic violence victims for whom shelter-in-place is unsafe; and many more. For those who represent an intersection of marginalized identities, these hardships are severely compounded.

Not only are marginalized and vulnerable populations hit first and hardest, they are also often helped last and least. Disparities in outcomes are not just apparent in the immediate effects of a disaster—they expand and deepen into the recovery process. Following economic recessions, natural disasters, and public health crises, recovery is invariably slower and less stable for these populations, if it ever arrives.

All in all, these and other past disasters have repeatedly revealed that our society is neither as just nor as resilient as it ought to be: not in the midst of a crisis, and not in the years that follow. When comparing pre- and post-disaster outcomes for disasters between 1999 and 2013, it is clear that disasters exacerbate inequalities along lines of wealth, race, education, and homeownership.⁴³ On average, white homeowners of all education levels became wealthier after a natural disaster, and the gains in wealth actually increased with the severity of a disaster and the amount of ensuing FEMA spending.⁴⁴ In contrast, Black and Latinx renters of all education levels lost wealth post-disaster, and the severity of the decline in wealth increased with the severity of the storm. On average, in the aftermath of large storms worth \$1 billion in damages, the already sizeable wealth gap between a white, college-educated homeowner and a Black renter without a GED expanded further by \$375,000 as a result of the storm.⁴⁵

Disparities in COVID-19 impacts

...are unsurprising in a nation where:

Marginalized and vulnerable populations may struggle to access applications for aid. Seeking disaster assistance requires interacting with as many as 19 different agencies, often with distinct paperwork and processes. People with the deepest needs face the greatest application burdens due to a need to source assistance from multiple agencies. Many of the documents are repetitive and could be auto-filled.³²

Even if they do apply, marginalized and vulnerable populations may struggle to satisfy application requirements. After Hurricane Harvey, low-income applicants earning less than \$30,000 a year made up 28 percent of FEMA Individual Assistance applications but 48 percent of denials, driven by unverifiable occupancies or missed inspections.³³

In the years following a crisis, the compounding financial stress (and inadequate financial aid) cause financial disparities to balloon, rather than gradually reduce. On average, within a year, a medium-sized natural disaster leads to a 5-percentage point increase in the share of people with debt in collections—and instead of decreasing over time, this share doubles to 10 percentage points by year four.³⁵

This is because disasters exact broad negative impacts on financial health, affecting not just employment status, but also other gatekeepers to financial access, such as credit scores and mortgage delinquency. Building upon existing inequities, people living in communities of color hit by medium-sized disasters experienced an average 31-point credit score decline, compared with a 4-point decline for people in majority-white communities.³⁶

There is a racial disparity in business resilience. Between 2002 and 2011 (in between which the Great Recession occurred), 60 percent of white-owned businesses survived, compared to 49 percent of Black-owned firms.³⁹

This will likely be true for the current crisis. 40 percent of revenues of Black businesses are located in the five industries most vulnerable to COVID-19 (including leisure, hospitality, and retail), compared to 25 percent of businesses overall.⁴⁰⁻⁴¹

As the COVID-19 crisis creates a destructive, but rare window of political will, social participation, and priority resetting, local governments must seize the opportunity to pursue a just and resilient recovery: one that improves and sustains the wellbeing of all community members, above pre-crisis levels, by addressing pre-existing inequities and solidifying community resilience.

- Nationally, \$65 billion in public benefits remain unclaimed each year, resulting from intimidation, stigmatization, and systemic barriers to understanding program eligibility and navigating application processes.³⁴

- Credit score gaps consistently contribute to wealth inequality such as by preventing homeownership. White families in the U.S. have 10 times as much wealth as Black families.³⁷

- Even when controlling for income and loan size, Black and Latinx applicants were more likely to be denied conventional mortgages than white applicants.³⁸

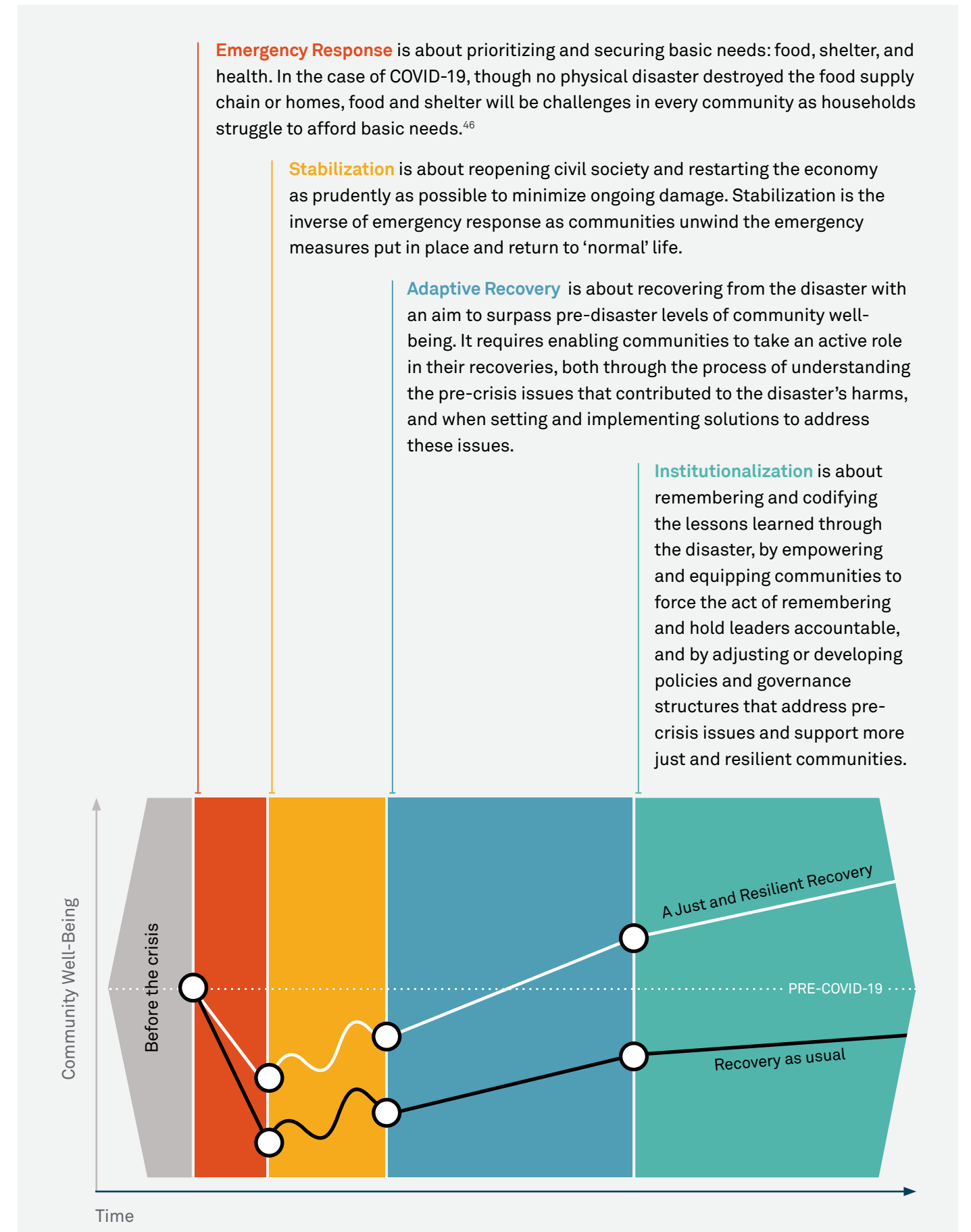
- Business ownership rates for non-white residents are disproportionately low: while Black people represent 12.7% of the population, they make up only 4.3% of businessowners.⁴²

Framework

Defining a framework to guide communities through the recovery process

Disasters are disorienting for all those impacted. Local governments must quickly sort out what to do, when to do it, and how to prioritize an overwhelming number of urgent issues. This recovery framework organizes the process into four phases to help communities orient and prioritize their actions.

Each phase presents distinct challenges, opportunities, and priorities, and can look very different for different places and communities. There is no way to use a framework to encompass and predict every challenge faced by every community in the disaster recovery process. This framework attempts, instead, to help communities anticipate and plan for the challenges that will characterize different stages of recovery in the near to long terms, holding cities accountable to the communities they serve.



The following sections will describe each phase in greater detail, oriented to the perspective of local and state governments who are choosing to undertake a just and resilient recovery to the COVID-19 crisis. For each phase, this document will highlight:

- **A central challenge** that characterizes each phase for local government leaders;
- **Guiding questions** that frame the primary considerations relevant to resolving that tension; and
- **Specific action items** that leaders must take to pursue a just and resilient recovery, with a focus on addressing the needs of marginalized and vulnerable populations.

PREVIEW OF PHASES AND ACTION ITEMS

Emergency Response

1. Create and communicate a tiered plan to respond to the disaster.

- a. Proactively communicate with marginalized and vulnerable populations.
- b. Help households with limited resources prepare for disaster-driven disruptions.
- c. Bridge gaps in trust that are the result of past injustices.

A ROLE FOR PHILANTHROPY: Create emergency mechanisms to capture and deploy funds to support community-based organizations and advocates led by, and supporting, marginalized and vulnerable people during the disaster.

2. Mobilize rapidly by forming quick partnerships and reorganizing teams and resources.

- a. Creatively partner “down” with local organizations to tangibly reach communities and deliver resources.
- b. Partner “up” with state and federal organizations to provide them with a local understanding of vulnerabilities.
- a. Re-task departments whose capacity would better serve a different need in emergency response.

A ROLE FOR PHILANTHROPY: Fund community-based organizations and advocates so that they can meaningfully partner with local governments in the aftermath of a disaster. Grantees not only need immediate resources (money/technology) for their organizations to survive and meet the needs of their communities, but also need to partner with local government on efforts such as analyzing community-generated data to understand local vulnerabilities.

3. Take decisive action, with an eye towards disparate impact.

- a. Act decisively but thoughtfully by analyzing and anticipating real-time needs through community-based networks.
- b. Suspend rules and take extraordinary actions where necessary to directly serve the needs of people.

A ROLE FOR PHILANTHROPY: Draw upon convening power and relationships with local government, community-based organizations and advocates to facilitate collaboration through peer-to-peer networks, with the goal of sharing best practices and advocating to state and local leaders for federal funds.

Stabilization

1. Create and communicate a tiered plan to keep marginalized and vulnerable individuals protected and safe as the economy reopens.

- a. Maximize the transparency and stability of reopening by establishing a clear and coordinated communications plan.
- b. Focus on restoring employment and services for marginalized and vulnerable populations when reopening businesses.
- c. Organize and fund services to support the ability of marginalized communities to participate in reopening.
- d. Unwind emergency actions without destabilizing households, workers, and businesses relying on emergency measures.

A ROLE FOR PHILANTHROPY: Provide flexibility in grantmaking to community-based organizations and advocates, as the pivotal roles grantees hold with their communities will need to be flexible in kind.

2. Dedicate available funding to support stabilization.

- a. Evaluate current needs in real-time through community-based networks and project future needs.
- b. Nimble reallocate local resources from existing reserves toward current need.
- c. Actively deploy federal programs to ensure that all available aid reaches marginalized and vulnerable populations.
- d. Find ways to fund the needs of those unlikely to qualify for direct federal assistance.

A ROLE FOR PHILANTHROPY: Communicate with and fund the recovery of community-based organizations and advocates least likely to participate in stimulus programs due to eligibility criteria and systemic barriers to access. The focus should be on the short-term interventions that lead to long-term solutions.

3. Expedite recovery by simplifying processes and eliminating bureaucratic barriers.

- a. Prioritize the delivery of assistance over regulatory safeguards.
- b. Identify regulatory or administrative barriers to accessing assistance—such as burdens of proof—and remove them.
- c. Push for maximum flexibility in public funding use.

A ROLE FOR PHILANTHROPY: Understand that community-based organizations and advocates closest to the ground can be resourced and supported to ensure that the disaster does not amplify existing inequities in distribution of philanthropic resources.

4. Partner to leverage community capacity and deploy funding as quickly as possible.

- a. Partner with existing local groups and community-based organizations who can expand public capacity to deploy assistance.
- b. Coordinate with the philanthropic community to provide assistance quickly to community-based organizations and reach those not positioned to receive public dollars.

Adaptive Recovery

1. Set recovery priorities through meaningful community planning.

- a. Engage a broad set of stakeholders, including marginalized and vulnerable networks and their advocates.
- b. Directly address local inequities—both historic and current.
- c. Insist on clear priorities that can guide future public investment.
- d. Retain local, community-based control over reform.

A ROLE FOR PHILANTHROPY: Partner with local government to identify and connect grantees and their networks to community disaster recovery planning, in order to ensure that community-based organizations and advocates led by, and supporting, marginalized and vulnerable people are not overlooked and undercounted.

2. Set recovery goals and metrics to guide recovery efforts and to communicate progress.

- a. Measure both outputs and outcomes to evaluate progress.
- b. Disaggregate metrics by race, ethnicity, gender, and geography to provide insight into the disparate rates of recovery for different communities.
- c. Tap into inclusive, community-led channels of communication to both report progress and receive feedback.

A ROLE FOR PHILANTHROPY: Partner and share evidenced-based outcome metrics and evaluative criteria for the data that matter to marginalized and vulnerable populations. Community-generated data captured through foundation-grantee relationships would be helpful precedent to tell accurate stories of inequitable recovery.

3. Design and implement catalytic initiatives that align with the recovery principals your community has set.

- a. Design recovery projects and programs that achieve multiple benefits for communities.
- b. Establish a clear set of equitable projects to kickstart recovery and build momentum.
- c. Leverage the capacity and expertise of community organization partners to implement equitable projects.

4. Aggregate and align funding in support of community-designed and -planned projects.

- a. Inventory the full range of available funding, and layer funding streams to maximize impact.
- b. Use public and philanthropic capital to attract positive and non-exploitative private investment into marginalized and vulnerable communities.
- c. Aggressively pursue federal funding, with an understanding of which communities do not qualify for federal aid.

A ROLE FOR PHILANTHROPY: Consider how you have engaged in public-private partnerships with local governments in the past: what were the constraints, and who were the beneficiaries? Fund grantees to participate with local government to design programs to connect equitable private investment with marginalized and vulnerable communities.

Institutionalization

1. Memorialize lessons learned into long-term community plans and strategies.

- a. Tell the story of what happened through a diversity of voices.
- b. Focus on understanding and addressing underlying inequities.
- c. Document and publicize the lessons learned.

2. Codify and operationalize community planning processes inside and outside of government to make permanent community memory and institutional knowledge.

- a. Use community-generated data and input to set community goals and priorities.
- b. Make metrics public and accessible to a diversity of communities, to use them as a point of conversation and as a mechanism for accountability.
- c. Plan for consistency of community values and visions between administrations.

3. Permanently remove unnecessary barriers to accessing aid.

- a. Reduce burdens of proof that prevent marginalized and vulnerable households from accessing aid.
- b. Shift the burden of navigating bureaucratic systems away from marginalized and vulnerable households.
- c. Relax use restrictions for funding.

A ROLE FOR PHILANTHROPY: If not already part of your portfolio, resource organizations that support enrollment in, and reduce barriers for, marginalized and vulnerable populations receiving public assistance.

4. Shift policies, regulations, and practices to address longstanding inequity.

- a. Create programs and policies that formalize an equitable disaster response
- b. Advance policies that address long-term inequities.

A ROLE FOR PHILANTHROPY: Support grantees that engage in advocacy, including year-round democracy and voter engagement work, to ensure an equitable recovery includes efforts to expand policies like worker and housing protections.

5. Expand and formalize pathways that connect with and serve marginalized communities.

- a. Reorganize departments, teams, and partnerships around priorities established with communities.
- b. Establish formal relationships with community organizations.
- c. Establish institutionalized partnerships between state and local government.

Read more about the Role for Philanthropy in the Amalgamated Foundation's [A New Front Line: Community-Led Disaster Response Lessons For The Covid-19 Moment.](#)

Emergency Response

Emergency Response is about prioritizing and securing basic needs: food, shelter, and health.

In the case of COVID-19, though hospitals, homes, and the food supply chain were not ravaged by a physical disaster, access to food, shelter, and medical care will be challenging in every community as households struggle to afford basic needs.⁴⁷



The key challenge within the emergency response phase is to exercise strong executive leadership during a quickly evolving situation, with limited information and often inadequate preparation.

At a moment when there is little time to spare yet little room for error, executive leaders will be repeatedly stretched and tested by a variety of confounding circumstances, including:

- **An environment of limited information:** Many local governments do not have access to data on vulnerable and marginalized populations, largely because this data goes unsolicited, not that it cannot be produced. Even when leaders have data, there will likely be a lack of community-generated information that reveals what is happening to people on the margins; a lack of accurate information if measurement protocols and data-collecting infrastructure are not in place; and a lack of permanent or reliable information as conditions will be in flux.
- **Greater difficulty obtaining community input and disseminating guidance:** Decisions will need to be made quickly yet with consideration of the diversity of public needs, while the normal methods of soliciting input and sharing guidance through community institutions are disrupted.
- **A need to balance public safety with economic activity:** Crises often present a struggle to balance between preventing loss of life and protect workers by suspending business as usual, and resuming business as usual given the economic harm that a shutdown has on businesses and workers.
- **Unclear legal obligations and authority:** A state or local government's obligations and authority to address disaster-period challenges are often unclear because responsibility is divided across different levels of government and the situations faced may be entirely unprecedented.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

How will you hear from, and be accountable to, marginalized and vulnerable communities as you form policies to respond to the disaster?

What are your mechanisms for receiving real-time information, and ensuring that information is disaggregated or community-generated to a degree that lets you identify how different communities are being impacted?

How will you address failures that are threatening public safety in your community regardless of your authority and legal responsibilities?

How will public safety measures impact marginalized and vulnerable communities differently? How will you be accountable to providing additional emergency assistance to offset these impacts?

EMERGENCY RESPONSE

1

Create and communicate a tiered plan to respond to multiple levels of disaster.

State and local leaders must regularly describe to the public the actions they plan to take in response to the disaster, adjustments to those actions scaled to the severity of the disaster, and updates on the information on which their decisions are based. By stating a set of emergency actions being considered and the conditions under which they will be enacted, state and local governments enable community members to prepare.

Proactively communicate with marginalized and vulnerable populations.

Local governments must open two-way channels of communication with marginalized and vulnerable populations, both to seek and solicit “community-generated data” on the lived experiences of these groups, and to clearly communicate public plans and the underlying risk data. To do so, local governments must recognize and tap into channels of communication trusted by these communities. These channels may be through faith-based organizations, unions, public schools, ethnic media channels, and neighborhood associations, depending on the local context. Communication must happen “early, often, and in multiple formats,” using language and messaging that is “locally and personally relevant.”⁴⁸

Help households with limited resources prepare for disaster-driven disruptions.

To the extent that a tiered response plan is made effectual through preparation, local governments must anticipate that some marginalized and vulnerable populations cannot afford to be prepared and adaptive—for example, by lacking the savings to stock up on supplies. Lower income adults age 50 or older are found to be significantly less prepared for natural disasters and will require additional support to weather disasters.⁴⁹

Bridge gaps in trust that are the result of past injustices.

An effectively communicated plan requires a degree of community trust. Communities of color, immigrants,⁵⁰⁻⁵¹ older adults,⁵² and rural communities⁵³ have been found to be especially hesitant to trust or interact with public authorities. This reality is understandable given these populations may face barriers to accessing systems of social services, are unaware of such services, or do not have services targeted to them at all, to name just a few reasons for mistrust. This trust must be built by supporting and drawing upon local leaders already trusted by the community to facilitate communication and action.



Boston demonstrated a multi-modal, multi-lingual approach to communicating Covid-19 news to the public.⁵⁴ The City of Boston expanded its text service to include 11 languages, targeting 37 percent of its residents who speak a language other than English at home. The City sent sound trucks through the hardest-hit neighborhoods to send public health messages. City employees made weekly robocalls to thousands of older adults, in multiple languages. Finally, bilingual staff conducted interviews with ethnic media to relay information and announcements. These multi-modal approaches are especially important when reaching residents who may not have regular access to internet or broadband.

Networks of promotores de salud, or lay community health workers, can help deliver public health information to marginalized and vulnerable populations.

⁵⁵ For example, Montgomery County, Maryland has a pool of over a hundred trained volunteer promotores who, during normal times, provide public health information to the local Latinx population regarding access to care, cancer screening services, HIV prevention, and tobacco-use prevention. Promotores can deliver public health messages through informal “knowledge centers” hosted in popular community spaces. This model of training and working with local liaisons is actively used in international development to reach rural communities, and may be applied to rural communities domestically as well.⁵⁶

EMERGENCY RESPONSE

2

Mobilize rapidly by forming quick partnerships and reorganizing teams and resources.

Local and state governments will be overwhelmed by the scale and range of need during the disaster. Gaps in response will quickly emerge and observing and stopping these gaps will require rapid movement and informal partnerships.

Creatively partner “down” with local organizations to tangibly reach communities and deliver resources. Communities most in need of outreach are often also the most difficult to reach. Local governments must partner with grassroots organizations to both better understand who these populations are, and to get as close to these populations as possible, even if the partner organizations are not traditionally well-established nonprofits. Such organizations may include unincorporated neighborhood associations, religious institutions, and informal groups that have the capacity and connections to serve hard-to-reach people.

Partner “up” with state and federal organizations to provide them with a local understanding of vulnerabilities. Most federal aid will flow through the states, and local governments will need to coordinate closely with states to be effective. Local governments will need to engage state representatives and Congressional delegations to represent local needs at the state legislature and in Washington. As many states and cities exhibit a “red/blue” divide, this coordination may prove difficult. Even in states where the governor, state legislature and mayors are politically aligned, navigating the relationships and the balance of control can be difficult. Regional and state governments are also often legally responsible for marginalized and vulnerable populations that are within local jurisdictions: they oversee court systems, jails, nursing homes, public housing, and other critical systems. A failure to uphold responsibilities to the people within these systems can have severe consequences. For example, during the 2017 hurricane season, state authorities were found guilty of fatal oversights in the regulation of nursing homes,⁵⁷ and a mismanagement of correctional institutions is a consistent theme through disasters of all kinds.⁵⁸

Re-task departments whose capacity would better serve a different need in the emergency response period. As a result of the disaster, some local government functions may halt or be greatly reduced—think the Department of Motor Vehicles, parking enforcement, or restaurants inspectors. Assigning these departments to work on critical emergency response activities that have some alignment with their expertise is a way to augment capacity, to reach households and businesses in need, and to handle the massive amount of paperwork that federal disaster aid creates.

EXAMPLES

As an early response to the COVID-19 crisis, the mayor of New Haven was able to apply social pressure on a local university to provide temporary emergency shelter on its campuses when its initial failure to do so—in contrast with another local university—was highlighted in a national publication.⁵⁹ Where partnerships cannot be mandated and are not preexisting, leaders can use their influence and publicity to pressure major actors to contribute to recovery efforts.

During the Great Recession, the City of New York partnered with the Financial Clinic to help low-income workers file tax returns for free. The Financial Clinic is an organization that runs one of the largest Volunteer Income Tax Assistance programs in NYC. Waiving the typical \$250 fee to file tax returns, the Clinic helped facilitate \$3.2 million in earned income tax credits (EITC) to over 2,000 filers.⁶⁰

During Hurricane Sandy, local leaders partnered with FEMA, the Red Cross, and the Census Bureau to access and disseminate local emergency information.⁶¹ This process was an application of FEMA’s “Whole Community Approach” to disaster response, which moves beyond government-centric disaster management to mobilize entire communities in preparation for disasters. Collaborations ranged from the use of a FEMA and Red Cross app to provide information to those with smartphones; to collaboration with the Census Bureau’s new emergency planner resources which provided demographic, housing, transportation, and special-populations information targeted to local responders.

EMERGENCY RESPONSE

3

Take decisive action, with an eye towards disparate impact.

Act decisively but thoughtfully by analyzing and anticipating real-time needs through community-based networks. To understand emerging local needs in as close to real time as possible, local governments should partner closely with community-based organizations and advocates led by and serving vulnerable and marginalized groups. Existing data-gathering and performance measurement systems must also be adapted and well-utilized.

Suspend rules and take extraordinary actions where necessary, to directly serve the needs of people. Such actions should be taken in proportion to the disaster. Even though legal obligations and delegation of responsibilities may be unclear, local leaders must step into positions of accountability where other leaders may have failed to act.

EXAMPLES

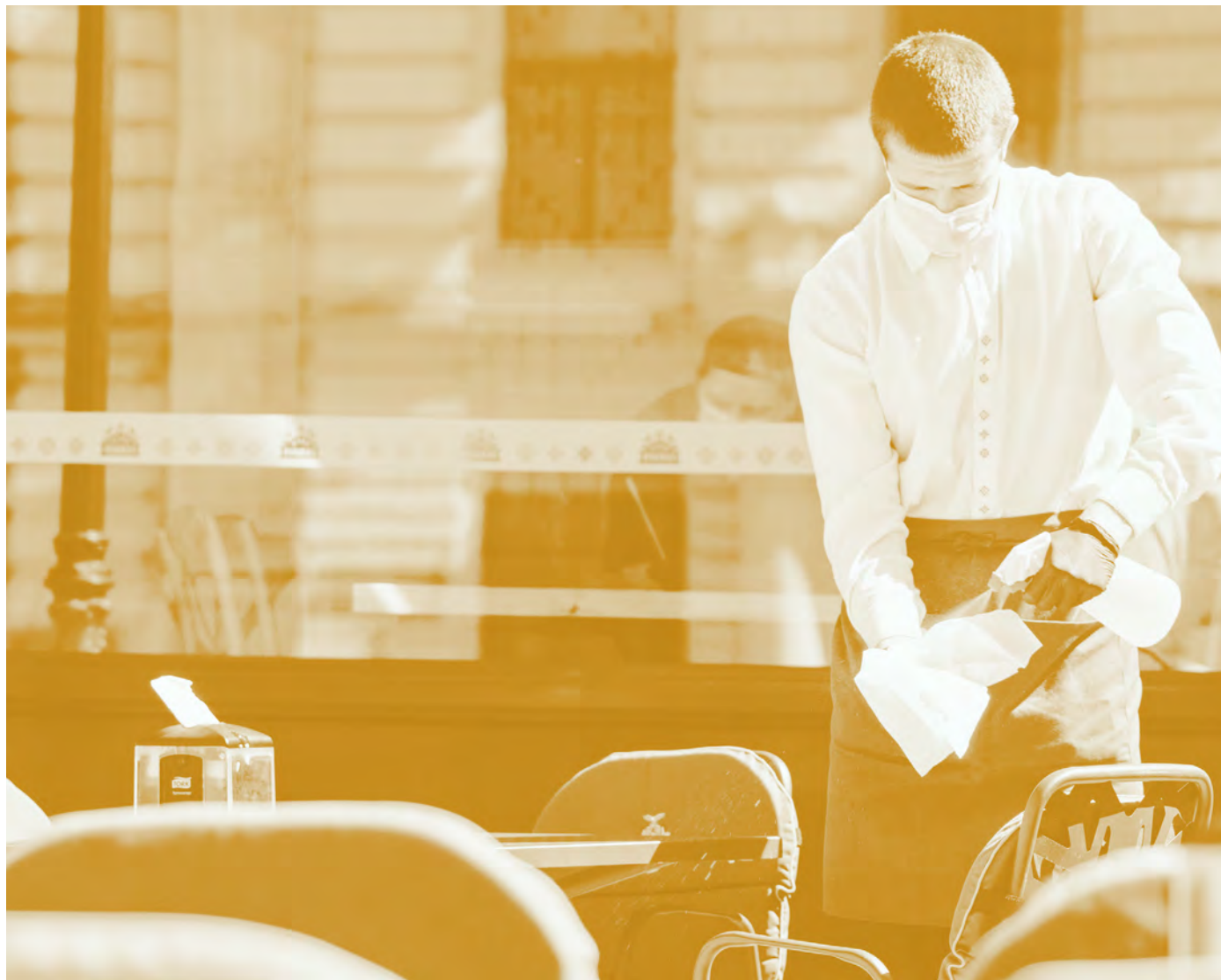
In the early months of the COVID-19 crisis within the U.S., the emergency measures that local leaders are willing to take have proven to be extensive.⁶²

- On housing, many states responded by temporarily suspending evictions and foreclosures, and an increasing number of cities have rolled out rental assistance programs.
- Some cities have created paid sick leave programs, mandating employers to provide proactive or retroactive paid sick leave.
- Many states and cities have moved to decarcerate and release people from institutions.

Stabilization

Stabilization is about reopening civil society and restarting the economy as prudently as possible to minimize ongoing damage.

Stabilization is the inverse of emergency response, as communities unwind the emergency measures put in place and return to 'normal' life.



The key challenge faced by local governments in this phase is to gather and leverage sufficient capacity to deploy assistance to where help is needed most.

Marginalized and vulnerable populations often have the most time-sensitive needs, and at the same time, are often underserved through parallel, under-resourced civic structures. It is more difficult to reach these populations through existing means of deploying assistance.

Leaders will also continue to face all the same leadership challenges experienced in the Emergency Response phase, only in the reverse. In a protracted and uncertain crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic, leaders will be asked to make difficult decisions based on insufficient information, and they will be challenged to maintain a spirit of flexibility.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

How are you ensuring that the “success” of and metrics around stability are defined by marginalized and vulnerable communities?

Who are you considering as part of your civic infrastructure to activate capacity and deploy resources during the response? Are well-resourced and connected nonprofits and civic organizations the only partners being tapped to act and seen as effective/efficient?

How are you prioritizing the deployment of assistance? Is it on a first-come, first-served basis? How are you meeting the needs of those less able, or trusting, to navigate the process to access assistance?

Are you being accountable to communities that vary across identity and wealth?

How are you varying the level and types of assistance provided to meet the needs of marginalized and vulnerable communities?

STABILIZATION

1

Create and communicate a tiered plan to keep marginalized and vulnerable individuals protected and safe as the economy reopens.

Local governments must take precautions to ensure that marginalized and vulnerable populations directly benefit from the reopening of the economy and are not put in danger or newly destabilized when temporary emergency relief is withdrawn.

Maximize the transparency and stability of reopening by establishing a clear and coordinated communications plan. As with the tiered approach to emergency response, a tiered reopening should be proactively and clearly communicated to all communities, especially the marginalized and vulnerable. Again, local governments must prepare a plan that speaks to local conditions, communicates through multiple modes and languages, and is shared in a timely manner.

Focus on restoring employment and services for marginalized and vulnerable populations when reopening businesses. Local governments should prioritize reopening industry sectors that employ large portions of marginalized households with limited financial savings, only when these workers are fully protected and safe. Focusing on reopening businesses safely and with worker protections that employ marginalized populations, helps to ensure those households are receiving the income needed to avoid entering crisis as government assistance ends and their savings are depleted.

Organize and fund services to support the ability of marginalized communities to participate in reopening. Local governments must restore access to public transit, childcare, stable housing, and other basic needs that are necessary for marginalized and vulnerable populations to fully participate in a reopened economy. Cities must also mandate that reopened businesses provide safe working conditions (e.g. provide personal protective equipment and frequent cleanings). Without these supports in place, it will be challenging for households to return to work, children to return to school, and businesses to return to full operation. During Hurricane Katrina, many low-income households could not afford to evacuate—but eventually, after the storm, the story evolved to one where they could not afford to return. Schools with high shares of low-income students of color tend to suffer from high chronic student absenteeism rates after a disaster.⁶³

Unwind emergency actions without destabilizing households, workers, and businesses relying on emergency measures. When emergency measures are removed, local governments must give thought to how a return to “normalcy” will be experienced by different populations. In many cases, local governments will need to establish “bridge” policies or programs. For example, with regards to housing, shifting immediately from an eviction stay to traditional evictions standards risks creating a wave of evictions for households unable to pay back rent. Establishing a mandatory mediation process or program to resolve back rent is likely to be necessary.

Los Angeles passed a “right of return” for laid-off workers, advocated by unions seeking to prevent old job positions from being refilled by “cheaper, newer labor.”⁶⁴ This rule would ensure that workers that have been laid off will be able to re-participate in the economy when employment and hiring resumes at their former places of work.

STABILIZATION

2

Dedicate available funding to support stabilization.

Evaluate current needs in real-time through community-based networks and project future needs. Local governments must estimate the level and degree of need for different types of households and businesses. For example, available data on unemployment should be used to estimate future risk of evictions and foreclosures to set aside adequate funding for emergency rental assistance, counseling, and legal aid. Housing costs beyond rent—such as insurance, utilities, and maintenance costs—should also be considered within funding programs and risk assessments, as any of these costs may jeopardize housing security.

Nimble reallocate local resources from existing projects and reserves toward current need. Local governments must share staff and budgets across government agencies, shifting responsibilities depending on needs. Capital resources must also be reallocated based on need, not existing budgets. Reallocating budgets goes against the culture of most organizations and is perhaps the most institutionally difficult task in this phase, but it is critical in a recovery context.

Actively deploy federal programs to ensure that all available aid reaches marginalized and vulnerable populations. A myriad of federal funding programs are included in the CARES Act and other recovery legislation. Local governments should work with states and community partners to undertake the difficult process of digesting the rules for these programs in order to take full advantage of the available support.

Find ways to fund the needs of those unlikely to qualify for direct federal assistance. Undocumented residents, those operating in the informal economy, or people otherwise at the margins of society will struggle to access federal assistance. Where there is a strong philanthropic presence, local leaders should partner with foundations to cover this gap.

Community-based organizations can help marginalized and vulnerable residents know and access their rights. For example, D.C. Jobs with Justice, a local coalition of labor organizations and community groups, has helped to distill all local D.C. policies into a series of regularly updated resources for residents to “know their rights.”⁶⁵ The City of Seattle has also created a simple “know your rights” tool,⁶⁶ and has taken care to compile COVID-19-related resources grouped by different types of needs.⁶⁷

Some cities have created programs to reach undocumented workers who have been excluded from federal relief programs.

- Washington D.C. established a \$15 million COVID-19 relief fund with \$5 million designated to undocumented workers.⁶⁸ This funding responded to immigrant advocacy groups such as Sanctuary DMV, who pleaded for the Mayor to bring relief to those who rely on nontraditional income streams. Money for the fund was drawn from reserves bookmarked for disaster relief, a budgetary precaution that the City took after the 2008 financial crisis.
- As a part of its COVID-19 relief effort, the Open Society Foundations made a \$20 million grant to create an Immigrant Emergency Relief Program with the City of New York, to provide one-time grants for up to 20,000 immigrant families, including undocumented immigrants. The fund will be managed by the Mayor’s Office of Immigrant Affairs and the nonprofit Mayor’s Fund to Advance New York City.⁶⁹

STABILIZATION

3

Prioritize the delivery of assistance over regulatory safeguards.

Speed is key. Most households cannot go two months without aid while their applications are being processed.

Provide lower-income households with financial aid that is as flexible as possible. It is crucial to empower and relieve households by providing them with money they can spend freely. Households have a range of needs, and they alone are best positioned to prioritize those needs. Local governments should push for public assistance to be as flexible as possible in terms of enrollment, disbursement

Identify regulatory or administrative barriers to accessing assistance—such as burdens of proof—and remove them. Local governments must avoid creating any additional regulations or administrative process beyond what is already in place, while making every effort to reduce the number of steps in the application process, as each is a potential bottleneck. Time is of the essence.

Push for maximum flexibility in public funding use. Following a disaster, rules for federal and state funding can be relaxed to support quick and flexible deployment. Local governments should closely track where there are regulatory barriers to effectively deploying funding. They should partner with other local governments and community advocates to identify common barriers, and jointly recommend changes to the rules and regulations to the responsible authority or agency. They should also lobby for reforms at the state and federal levels through state representatives and congressional delegations.

After Hurricane Maria, a group of legal aid advocates pushed FEMA to allow survivors to access financial assistance without undue burdens to verify their homeownership. Groups such as Ayuda Legal, Fundacion Fondo de Acceso a la Justicia, and Servicios Legales de Puerto Rico developed an affidavit tool named the “Sworn Declaration,” which allowed survivors to verify ownership on appeal instead of providing traditional ownership documentation.⁷⁰ Traditional documentation was not sensitive to the complex nature of homeownership on the island, leading 60 percent of Puerto Ricans to be denied FEMA help because they could not prove ownership of their homes.⁷¹

Chicago funneled \$2 million in housing trust fund money to create a Housing Assistance Grant program, offering 2,000 tenant-based vouchers worth \$1,000 each. This measure flexibly directed pre-procured funding to quickly place money into the hands of low-income residents struggling to pay rent. While this funding is not nearly enough to meet demand—the City received 83,000 applications for only 2,000 vouchers—it was valuable to quickly mobilize and provide relief where possible.⁷²

Maryland has announced that state-authorized licenses, permits, and registrations will be automatically extended through 30 days after the end of the state of emergency,⁷³ so that license holders and applicants are not struck with the stress of delivering paperwork either during or immediately after the crisis.

Funding flexibility was a key distinguishing trait and success factor for the 2009 TANF Emergency Fund, which issued \$1.3 billion to temporarily and countercyclically employ 260,000 low-income unemployed people. Flexibility allowed the fund to help small rural communities, big cities, and everything in between—no two subsidized programs looked alike.⁷⁴

4

Partner to leverage community capacity and deploy funding as quickly as possible.

Public subsidy and private investors must be deployed with the goal of reaching marginalized and vulnerable populations. This task is all about scale and speed: the scale of capacity must be commensurate to the scale of need. In post-crisis times, need may grow 100-fold, and capacity must match the level of need. This level of mobilization cannot be achieved within local government alone.

Partner with existing local groups and community-based organizations who can expand public capacity to deploy assistance. It is easier and more effective to work with a community if there is existing familiarity, trust, and local know-how. Community-based organizations, like member-based nonprofits, faith-based organizations, business improvement districts and neighborhood associations are critical partners in pushing out aid to local communities, as they have existing relationships and rapport with marginalized and vulnerable communities.

Coordinate with the philanthropic community to provide assistance quickly to community-based organizations and reach those not positioned to receive public dollars. Volunteer- and reimbursement-based support will be inadequate to fill gaps in capacity; this is exacerbated by the fact that social distancing measures have limited the number of volunteers available. Local governments will need to dedicate immediate funding, both flexibly and with fewer constraints, to cover the costs of staff and supplies for providing assistance to marginalized and vulnerable communities. Philanthropic funding is often better positioned to support these efforts, especially when coordinated and leveraging local government dollars and community-based organizational networks and capacity.

After the foreclosure crisis, HUD partnered with its network of intermediaries to implement the National Foreclosure Mitigation Counseling Program (NFMC). The program responded to a growing need for post-recession foreclosure counseling. The program proved to be very effective: 64 percent of participants remained out of serious delinquency after eight months post-counseling, and participants were able to receive loan modifications that saved borrowers an average of \$267 per month.⁷⁵

In Houston, after Hurricane Harvey, Familias Immigrantes y Estudiantes en La Lucha (FIEL) canvassed apartments where they could reach undocumented immigrants, providing them with FEMA application assistance and other options for accessing aid. During this process, FIEL also helped tenants move to safer housing, after discovering that many undocumented immigrants were living in dangerously mold-infested apartments but were too afraid to leave or complain. FIEL would not have qualified for most public recovery grants, but was empowered by philanthropic money (the Harvey Community Fund), which recognized that major nonprofits would not have known which apartments to canvas or have had the capacity and creativity to mobilize so soon after the storm.⁷⁶

Adaptive Recovery

Adaptive Recovery is about recovering from the disaster with an aim to surpass pre-disaster levels of community well-being, through increased equity.

It requires giving communities an active role in their recoveries, both through the process of understanding the pre-crisis issues that contributed to the disaster's harms, and when setting and implementing solutions to address these issues.



The key challenge faced by local governments in the adaptive recovery phase is to set and stick to community priorities that address longstanding inequities, using limited available funding.

Following a disaster, there are many competing demands for funding, most of which are worthwhile. It takes a broad and deep community commitment to a Just and Resilient Recovery to ensure that the long-standing inequities faced by marginalized and vulnerable communities, exacerbated by the immediate needs of the crisis, receive the funding necessary to build towards a new normal that is better than before.

- **Budget shortfalls begin to really hit, right as spending needs for a recovery rise.** State and local governments will begin to face deep fiscal constraints, as these governments (unlike the federal government) have a fiscal obligation to maintain balanced budgets. Tax revenue shortfalls resulting from lower retail sales and payrolls will emerge along with increased pension obligations to offset the market downturn. Federal funding can address some of these shortfalls, but it is often slow to arrive and not flexible enough to meet community needs.
- **Government funding processes tend to default to the pre-disaster status quo.** Without adjustments to the budgeting process, public funding will flow into projects and activities that were on the books before the disaster.
- **Consensus around what should be a priority will fray, as the focus shifts from immediate to long-term needs.** Immediately after the disaster, generally there is agreement about meeting the needs of households and small businesses who were impacted through no fault of their own. As time passes, long-standing inequities faced by marginalized and vulnerable communities are demonstrated by widening gaps between communities that are quicker to recover and those that are slower to recover.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

How will you ensure that disaster recovery community planning processes include, and are accountable to organizations led by and representing marginalized and vulnerable populations, and result in actionable recommendations?

How will you center these processes on the underlying issues that led to greater harm to marginalized and vulnerable communities as a result of the disaster?

What criteria will you set to evaluate whether recovery initiatives align with the goal of a Just and Resilient Recovery?

What are you measuring to understand the impacts of the disaster, and what mechanism is holding you accountable to stay true to a Just and Resilient Recovery?

ADAPTIVE RECOVERY

1

Set recovery priorities through meaningful community planning

Engage a broad set of stakeholders, including marginalized and vulnerable networks and their advocates. Recovery strategies are created during a moment of repositioning and reckoning, as communities rebuild and recover to reach new levels. This process must be inclusive if that rebuilt world is to be inclusive. The recovery planning process should engage a broad set of stakeholders, especially those who are typically excluded from such processes, reaching beyond the people who self-select into meeting participation. At this point in the recovery, local governments should ideally have already explored new partnership and outreach efforts; these relationships should be extended through longer-term planning processes.

Stabilization is a prerequisite to engaging marginalized and vulnerable populations. To create the conditions for a more thoughtful and inclusive recovery process, local governments must ensure that the fundamental needs of all communities are met.

Directly address local inequities—both historic and current. The disaster recovery planning process should make use of this moment to directly confront the underlying conditions in communities, which led to a disparity in outcomes. For many communities, this is driven both by a history of redlining and racial segregation and by ongoing economic development practices that drive inequity, leading communities of color to be concentrated in areas correlated to increased risk of COVID infection and fatality.

Insist on clear priorities that can guide future public investment. This planning process should not be performative, nor should it produce a laundry list of wishes. To be effective it must set real criteria by which to evaluate potential recovery initiatives and wrestle with tradeoffs that are inherent in setting priorities. This requires putting advocates and community members in a position where they have to grapple with the inherent tradeoffs that come with a limited budget and any policy as part of the planning process.

Maintain local, community-based control over reform. Local governments should be cautious that post-disaster reform remains driven by local voices and needs, especially of those that have been marginalized, and not evolve into an opportunity to impose an outside reform agenda, however well-intentioned it may be. For example, after Hurricane Katrina, a pre-determined school reform agenda led to a state takeover of public schools in New Orleans, which consequently led to “the expansion of charter schools, an introduction

to school choice via the removal of geographic attendance zones, as well as a radical racial shift in teachers.”⁷⁷ These efforts were supported by federal and philanthropic money. This example serves as a reminder that reform in the name of disaster recovery can at times be destructive to communities who have already been disempowered through their suffering of the disaster.

“Reform shouldn’t be done to the community; it should be undertaken by the community... In this regard, recovering cities should take the time they need to make sure exclusion from the recovery process doesn’t prolong the damage caused by the storm.” – ANDRE PERRY⁷⁸

After Hurricane Maria, in response to strong advocacy, Puerto Rico’s public officials acknowledged and shifted away from destructive pre-storm fiscal priorities that had placed the interests of investors over those of residents. Construyamos Otro Acuerdo (Let’s Build Another Agreement), supported by the Center for Popular Democracy, pressured the Fiscal Control Board to prioritize spending on public services and pensions, which had been cut to pay back private debt. This advocacy has had enduring effects on local government priorities, as the island’s oversight board has announced intentions to keep pension cuts off the table in debt deals during the COVID-19 response.

Leaders should follow the example of communities that have used planning processes to more directly confront legacies of redlining and racism. For example, “undesign the Redline” is a traveling exhibit, workshop series, and curriculum that uses interactive media to communicate structural racism to exhibit-goers. The curriculum deftly portrays both the historical roots and contemporary manifestations of racial segregation.⁷⁹ In Minneapolis, consciousness of the history of redlining has translated to tangible policy, as the city became the first in the nation to ban single-family zoning, a bold step towards more inclusive urban development.⁸⁰

2

Set recovery goals and metrics to guide recovery efforts and to communicate progress.

Local governments should use metrics to quantify and communicate progress towards recovery—and these metrics must be defined and gathered in a way that captures whether the recovery is reaching marginalized and vulnerable populations. Having recovery metrics will allow communities to measure the effectiveness of initiatives and tell the story of recovery.

Measure both outputs and outcomes to evaluate progress. Local governments must make sure that metrics not only measure the outputs of actions being taken, but also capture the outcomes that are ultimately most important. Positive outputs can contribute to, but do not guarantee positive outcomes. For example, if a city recruits an employer who brings 1,000 new jobs, but it is not monitoring the unemployment rate of existing residents without a college degree, the unspecific metric may create a misunderstanding of the community's economic health.

Metrics must also be thoroughly developed: every goal set by the community must have an associated set of key metrics. Only when these metrics are systematically in place will the community and leaders have the right points of reference to monitor progress.

Disaggregate metrics by race, ethnicity, gender, and geography to provide insight into the disparate rates of recovery for different communities.

For residents in neighborhoods experiencing faster recoveries, it is important to understand that other communities are not doing as well, and that additional support is necessary. For residents in areas that are not recovering as quickly, it is important that their needs are made evident and communicated to others.

Tap into inclusive, community-led channels of communication to both report progress and receive feedback. Ensure that data is made publicly available, with clear goals and milestones against which to evaluate progress. Public metrics and transparency help to establish trust and confidence in the recovery process. To be truly transparent and a means for accountability, progress reports must recognize and quantify failures in addition to successes, to prepare for the consequences thereof. The reporting process must also be done by an independent entity.

In New Orleans, the City turned to data science to combat pervasive post-storm blight. Mayor Mitch Landrieu had a goal of cutting blight by 10,000 units between 2010 and 2014, and the City achieved this goal a year early. BlightStat, an analytics program, helped this effort by combining data from the Department of Code Enforcement and other agencies and distilling this to key metrics. These data and metrics were presented in monthly public meetings, and were used to identify solutions, set priorities, and evaluate performance.⁸¹

After Hurricane Sandy, New York City developed the Sandy Funding Tracker, which followed the progress of post-storm recovery projects.⁸² The City was mandated under Local Law 140 to publish information on post-recovery projects, including both the sources and uses of funding. By focusing on funded projects, the tracker was oriented around the effective stewardship of \$50 billion in public dollars. The tracker is divided into five areas of interest—Housing, Business, Infrastructure, Emergency, and Resiliency—with a set of performance metrics for each updated in real time.

3

Design and implement catalytic initiatives with and for marginalized and vulnerable communities.

Local governments should take on bold efforts to rebuild and reinvest in communities, in partnership with other community stakeholders. These efforts should be significant enough to meaningfully mitigate deep-set inequities.

It is important to first understand what initiatives are needed, then to consider how to pay for it with federal funding—asking what federal funding or other outside funding sources can pay for first will distract from the priorities of a Just and Resilient Recovery.

Design recovery projects and programs that achieve multiple benefits for communities. Note, a “project” might be the revitalization of a commercial corridor, and a “program” might be a fund that provides small business loans. Due to resource constraints, directing large amounts of funding towards executing single-purpose projects or running single-purpose programs is not optimal. They must address multiple issues together. For example, a road-building project must also contribute to employment for marginalized and vulnerable populations, be designed to increase transportation options for residents without cars, address stormwater flooding, or otherwise contribute to whatever priorities have been set through the planning process.

Establish a clear set of equitable projects to kickstart recovery and build momentum. To avoid delays and start the recovery process, local governments and their partners should tee up and fast-track projects that will have the greatest impact on serving and driving resources to marginalized and vulnerable communities. Local governments should evaluate projects and give merit to those that are “shovel-ready,” as it is critical to deliver results and relief as quickly as possible. At the same time, local governments must also work to push the design of these projects to be maximally equitable, and to generate new equitable “shovel-ready” projects, such that expediency does not give way to a continuation of preexisting inequities.

Leverage the capacity and expertise of community organization partners to implement equitable projects. Community-based organizations, quasi-governmental, philanthropic, and for-profit organizations will have expertise and capacities that state and local government lack. This might be the capacity to create and run a small business loan fund, manage the revitalization of a disinvested commercial corridor, or ramp up technical training for existing residents.

After Hurricane Harvey, the HOME coalition—a coalition of funders, advocates, and labor groups— negotiated with the City of Houston to create a worker protection program for post-storm rebuilding contracts. The coalition secured workplace standards, a \$15 minimum wage, and insurance benefits for all workers supporting more than \$300 million in affordable housing and multifamily construction projects funded by federal rebuilding funds. The program also requires 10 percent of work hours to be allocated to workers registered in an apprenticeship or bilingual craft training program, and allocates another 10 percent of work hours to low-income residents eligible for Section 3 housing assistance.⁸³

The Project-Based Recovery Opportunity Program (PROP) boosts local economic development priorities in parishes impacted by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita by offering direct low-cost loans for mid-sized businesses that are located or intend to locate in an area suffering long-term effects of the hurricanes. For-profit businesses, community-based nonprofit organizations, community development financial institutions and community-based economic development organizations with significant operations in Louisiana are eligible. Each applicant must create a minimum number of jobs, based on the industry standards, have a minimum annual gross revenue of \$250,000 for existing businesses, and CDBG funds cannot exceed 75 percent of total costs. Special consideration is given to projects that align with community goals, such as creating opportunities for historically disadvantaged businesses or the preservation of historical structures.⁸⁴

ADAPTIVE RECOVERY

4

Aggregate and align funding in support of community-designed and -planned projects.

Following a disaster, the normal sources of capital local governments rely on are disrupted. To move forward with the recovery process, local governments must inventory the available funding and weave it together to address the needs of their communities.

Inventory the full range of available funding, and layer funding streams to maximize impact. Local governments should assemble and assess a “capital stack” of all available funding sources, whether that is local or state or federal public funding, private or philanthropic capital, and whether it comes through direct investment or policy change. With an understanding of the available capital, local governments can more strategically allocate between different projects to maximize impact. For example, a local government might be able to funding from the Department of Agriculture to expand and improve the sources of fresh local food to their community, upgrade foodbanks with FEMA Public Assistance to be able to do clean hands offs that allow for social distancing and use CDBG funds to reopen local grocery stores and retrofit them to have better safer HVAC systems and support curbside pickup.

Use public and philanthropic capital to attract positive private investment into marginalized and vulnerable communities. Private capital—be it loan or equity—is risk adjusted, making it both much more expensive and less likely to flow into marginalized and vulnerable communities, where the risk of investments is structurally higher. The public and philanthropic sector should partner with the private sector to increase the flow of positive private investment into communities where it would not otherwise, with the imperative that private capital is directed to rebuild and uplift existing communities, rather than further exploit or displace them. Local governments must guard against the multiple forms that disaster capitalism can take, such as when private funds buy up financially or physically distressed properties in bulk—as seen during the foreclosure crisis and after major storms.⁸⁵ We are entering an era of workouts where the capital stack for most properties, commercial and residential, will be reworked. This can result in greater community control and affordability or a consolidation of absentee ownership and extraction of community wealth.

Aggressively pursue federal funding, with an understanding of which communities do not qualify for federal aid. While this is a process that will have already begun in prior phases, continuing to pursue available federal and state funding is important. Later phases of federal disaster aid tend to be more oriented to adaptive recovery than earlier phases, which focus on emergency response and stabilization.

Local and state governments should remain in close coordination to actively advocate for and pursue increased federal funding. Without that funding, cities and states will not only need to cut back on services, but they will also have to cut public sector jobs and pensions that are a lifeline for many communities of color. Local governments must also continue to support households and businesses to aggressively apply for later rounds of federal assistance, such as CDBG Phase 2 funding, which will be allocated based on need.⁸⁶

EXAMPLES

The Detroit Home Mortgage program was launched through a partnership between philanthropy and private banks. The Kresge Foundation led this effort, by making a \$475,000 grant to support the fund’s start-up operations, and by providing \$6 million in guarantees to the second mortgage pool to help borrowers hold onto their homes in times of hardship. The Ford Foundation, the Michigan State Housing Development Authority, and numerous private banks also partnered to launch the program.⁸⁷

After Hurricane Harvey, a coalition of fair housing advocates pushed FEMA to include the true impact of the storm on marginalized and vulnerable populations when estimating damages, which led the city to receive more federal funding than otherwise, using HUD’s methodology for determining jurisdiction aid.⁸⁸ The City was able to keep its \$2.5 billion in federal money under local control, and created historic equity guidelines that directed 80 percent of housing recovery funds to low-income families.⁸⁹ (However, since then, the state has recently reclaimed control over Houston’s disaster funding).⁹⁰

Institutionalization

Institutionalization is about remembering and codifying the lessons learned through the disaster.

By empowering and equipping communities to force the act of remembering and hold leaders accountable, and by adjusting or developing policies and governance structures that address pre-crisis issues and support more just and resilient communities.



The key challenge for leaders in the institutionalization phase is to ensure that the lessons learned through the first three phases—including the importance of leadership, cohesion, and prioritizing a Just and Resilient Recovery—are not lost, but instead operationalized.

Disasters like pandemics and hurricanes affect wide swaths of people through extraordinary and extreme ways, where public awareness and response is understandably heightened. But crises are not limited to point-in-time disasters—many communities are afflicted by a lack of access to basic needs on a regular basis. Local governments must retain their memory of and focus on preparing for future acute and society-wide ramifications, while working to address long-standing societal inequities.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

What inequities has your community confronted during the recovery process that it might lose focus on over time?

How will you ensure that official record of what happened during, and as a result of, the disaster includes the experiences of marginalized and vulnerable populations?

What new governance structures will need to be enacted to increase accessibility for those who are marginalized and vulnerable and establish accountability for those traditionally in power?

Which changes in local government programs and policies improved the ability to serve marginalized and vulnerable communities and should be made permanent?

INSTITUTIONALIZATION

1

Memorialize lessons learned into long-term community plans and strategies.

Tell the story of what happened, through a diversity of voices. The impacts of the disaster must be understood not just in terms of mainstream experiences, but with a close understanding of how a variety of communities were affected. Local governments must leverage the relationships built through the recovery process to ensure the experiences of marginalized and vulnerable communities are captured and understood widely.

Focus on understanding and addressing underlying inequities. Some issues were unique to the disaster; others were simply revealed by it. Local governments and community leaders should make a concerted pivot towards talking about and addressing the underlying conditions—poverty, public health, inequality, marginalization—that posed the greatest risks for past disasters and will continue to for future ones.

Document and publicize the lessons learned, so that they can be referenced in future times of need. This documentation could be funded in partnership with philanthropy, and take the form of an official report, an exhibit, and/or a monument to signal the importance and increase its longevity. It is important that the documentation be accessible a decade or further into the future when local administrations and staff have turned over reducing institutional memory.

The New Orleans Index was a project undertaken between the Brookings Institution and the Data Center to create a yearly “index” measuring New Orleans’ recovery from Hurricane Katrina. The index began as a tracker focused specifically on recovery from Katrina, and it eventually became a broader measure of the city’s wellbeing and resilience as multiple subsequent storms (such as Rita) compounded the city’s need to document recovery. Each report’s title contained the number of years that had passed since Katrina (e.g. “the New Orleans Index at Six” was published in 2010), a naming construct that built in a constant reference to and reminder of the watershed moment that Katrina represented. After the tenth report, the index became a biennial production.⁹¹

INSTITUTIONALIZATION

2

Codify and operationalize community planning processes inside and outside of government to make permanent community memory and institutional knowledge.

Use community-generated data and input to set community goals and priorities. As local governments create or update long-range strategic plans and set budget priorities, they must adopt a process that uses community-generated data and input to first help set community priorities, and then to track and advance progress towards these priorities.

Make metrics public and accessible to a diversity of communities, to use them as a point of conversation and as a mechanism for accountability. Metrics should serve the important role of an accountability measure. They form a starting point for inviting community input, and they allow those outside of government, such as community-based organizations and advocates, to monitor public progress.

Plan for consistency of community values and visions between administrations. Even as leadership and administrations change, the fundamental needs and goals of a community do not. Establishing the role of community-based organizations and advocates in setting goals and monitoring progress against goals can help to increase consistency.

After Hurricane Harvey, Houston committed to the “Resilient Houston” plan. For a city, whose first ever comprehensive plan was created in 2014, the Resilient Houston plan represented a milestone in the city’s resilience-building efforts, after being hit by six federally declared flooding disasters in a span of five years. The engagement strategy for this resilience plan involved hundreds of partners engaged through workshops and working groups.⁹²

New York City has implemented a Talking Transition engagement strategy at a mayoral transition, to convene the public in informing the agenda of the incoming mayor. Talking Transition drew comments from nearly 70,000 people on government-influenced quality of life issues, which were briefed to the incoming administration to inform policymaking. The program was funded by a range of philanthropic partners (including the Ford Foundation, Atlantic Philanthropies, the New York Women’s Foundation, and others).⁹³

INSTITUTIONALIZATION

3

Permanently remove unnecessary barriers to accessing aid.

Local governments must create more flexible approaches to public assistance that first, meet communities where they are while in crisis, and second, maintain those approaches that made the social safety net more effective. Large-scale disasters grip the consciousness of an entire society, but, the symptoms of disaster—housing instability, a lack of food access, and health crises—afflict our most marginalized and vulnerable populations day to day.

Reduce burdens of proof. Local governments should commit to providing base levels of assistance without a need for burdensome documentation. For example, governments agencies could increase the flow of data between agencies and with some private actors such as insurance agencies, to ease the application process for vulnerable households who may have lost access to or documentation of administrative information such as tax returns. Such measures must not neglect to place privacy and security concerns of marginalized and vulnerable populations front and center.

Shift the burden of navigating bureaucratic systems away from marginalized and vulnerable households. Nobody should be prevented from receiving full public support because they do not have the time, literacy, or support to fill out complex paperwork and navigate multiple administrative systems. Local governments could establish community-based intake centers that allow for a single point of entry into the system. Agencies should also be evaluated on their ability to disburse money, and not on measures of “efficiency” that disincentivize helping the most people with as many resources as possible.

Relax use restrictions for funding. Recipients of aid should be trusted to use funding in a way that best serves their needs. By directing public assistance into use-restricted programs, governments are essentially shaping household budget allocations—which is inevitably less efficient and uniquely responsive to idiosyncratic needs than allowing households to make these allocation decisions themselves.

New York City’s Human Resources Administration launched the ACCESS HRA app and website in 2017, to allow New Yorkers to receive public assistance and manage benefits without needing to physically visit an HRA SNAP center or job center. This institutionalized tool has proven to be a vital service in the City’s response to COVID-19, which effectively requires people to have the option to access their benefits safely and virtually.⁹⁴

Maryland’s BEACON One-Stop Application allows all types of unemployment insurance claims to be filed entirely online through a single application. These include applications to the Pandemic Unemployment Assistance program and the Pandemic Emergency Unemployment Compensation program. Having such networks already in place allows disaster-period funding processes to be directly incorporated into an existing consolidated system. Previously, the state required applicants to file by phone.

INSTITUTIONALIZATION

4

Shift policies, regulations, and practices to address longstanding inequities.

Create programs and policies that formalize an equitable disaster response. The equitable means of disaster response that have been outlined in this document should be formally established through local programs, if not already: from engaging emergency interpreters and developing disaster preparation materials in multiple languages, to designating community-based organizations and leaders to be points of contact for future events.

Advance policies that address long-term inequities. Local governments should target the underlying stressors and inequities within communities, by pursuing policies that—in the long term—mitigate the short-term pains induced by crisis. Philanthropic engagement and funding play a key role in lead long-term reform, through partnership with local government and advocates.

Emergency measures...

should translate to long-term policies.

Emergency housing assistance

Funding for long-term supportive housing

Decarceration (jails, prisons, juvenile justice centers)

Mandatory long-term reentry and rehousing plans

COVID sick leave policies

Mandatory employer-paid sick leave

Eviction stays

Special tenant-landlord mediation courts

Expanded testing capacity

Expanded clinics and emergency care to underserved communities

Outreach to those without Internet access

Treatment of broadband as an essential utility that all households must have cheap access to

INSTITUTIONALIZATION

5

Expand and formalize pathways that connect with and serve marginalized communities.

Reorganize departments, teams, and partnerships around priorities established with communities. Local governments must update governance structure, staff, and skills, by revisiting the institutional implications of governance structures such as the compositions of boards and voting parameters for organizations, such that they are inclusive of community voices. Numerous cities have established resilience departments in the past decade, and the efficacy of such departments can be undermined by a lack of staff or coordination between departments. It is therefore crucial to both empower departments to be effective, while structuring them to be responsible and held accountable to the community.

Establish formal relationships with community-based organizations. Partnerships with community-based organizations, including informal ones pursued during disaster recovery, should become a norm. To formalize these relationships, “state and local governments should support the creation of land trusts, co-ops, and other legal entities that will allow communities to interact directly with federal grants as communities, and not just as collections of individuals.”⁹⁵ Doing so will expand both the reach and cultural competency of local governments, ensuring that they can effectively hear from and speak to marginalized and vulnerable communities.

Establish institutionalized partnerships between state and local government, in the form of inter-governmental agreements and entities. Establish avenues for higher levels of government to work collaboratively to address inequities.

A direct outcome of the Resilient Houston strategy was to create a Department Resilience Officer (DRO) position within every city department. This directive, issued through a mayoral executive order, helped to institutionalize the importance and relevance of resilience planning across all municipal functions.⁹⁶

After Hurricane Maria, the Mayor Exchange was created as a peer exchange and technical assistance program to support Puerto Rico’s mayors in building their capacity and resources, including their capacities to understand community priorities.⁹⁷

The Neighborhood Participation Program for Land Use Actions (NPP) was created through a city charter change to establish a formal channel of communication between the City Planning Commission and residents. The NPP provides “timely notification of any proposed land use action affecting a neighborhood” and provides “the opportunity for meaningful neighborhood review of and comment on such proposals.”⁹⁸

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